



SHSI (IOWA CITY): DAVID F. BARRY COLLECTION

**A**s emigration expanded during the century, the American Indian nations that witnessed covered wagons crossing their hunting territories found their shrinking numbers restricted to reservations and their people dependent on government annuities. David Barry photographed this census-taking late in the century at Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota.

## In the Wake of the Western Trails

**T**he story of the western trails did not end in the 1870s—nor did the impact of the trails on western lands and peoples. U.S. government treaties shifted American Indian nations from their wide-ranging hunting grounds to reservations. Homesteaders developed local transportation routes to connect their new communities. Railroads, eager to recapture investments, brought first emigrants and then tourists to the West.

By the 20th century and the Age of the Automobile, traveling across the West became a matter of finding service stations, photographing majestic scenery, writing postcards, and visiting those distant cousins whose parents had emigrated west 50 years earlier.

And what of the five diarists

with whom we journeyed west in this issue? Kitturah Belknap, who had spent so many winter nights in Van Buren County sewing for the trip, ended her diary with the good news that the party was only a half-day from Fort Hall, Idaho.

Nevertheless, pregnant with another child and worried about her son Jessie, who was sick with mountain fever, she wrote: "It's morning. I have been awake all night watching with the little boy. He seems a little better; has dropped off to sleep. The sun is just rising and it shows a lot of the dirtiest humanity ever was seen since the creation. We just stop for an hour and eat a bite and let the teams breathe again. We divide the water with the oxen. George has sat on his seat on the front of the wagon all night and I have held the little boy on my lap on a pillow

and tended him as best I could. I thot in the night we would have to leave him here and I thot if we did I would likely to stay with him but as the daylight [came], we seemed to get fresh courage."

Eventually, Kitturah Belknap and her husband, George, ranched and farmed in Oregon. Five more children were born to them; two died of typhoid. Kitturah died in 1913, at age 93.

**I**owan James Cowden, who had been so "anxious to get to the land of gold," finally reached California on October 12, 1853—six months and five days after he had left Keosauqua. On January 1, 1854, he reflected in his diary again: "After spending a few months here I will add a few words to my daily



record. . . . An overland trip to California or Oregon is not difficult or dangerous. I really enjoyed it and could spend several years very pleasantly traveling through the hills and mountains of this western country. Its wild scenery is very interesting to me, and I do not see how any person can help enjoying it. But a person that has a team of 4 or 5 pairs of oxen to drive every day will have but little time or inclination for romancing. . . .

"From Fort Laramie to the Nevada Mountains, a distance of twelve or fourteen hundred miles, wild sage constitutes three fourths of the vegetation to be seen," he wrote. "I would give more for one county in Iowa than for all of it, except perhaps the Salt Lake Valley. Can't see any use for so much desert country, for certainly it is good for nothing only to hold the rest of Creation together. . . .

"While on the road to California, the men would sometimes get to talking about a railroad across the plains to San Francisco, and all thought it would be a good thing,

though few think it will be built during our day. One man expressed the opinion that one would be built within twenty-five years or thirty years if California continued to turn out gold as freely as at present, but most thought it more likely to be fifty or one hundred years before any road would be built. . . .

"But take the whole country, it seems to me to be of little account except for the gold it contains. No doubt there is untold millions of gold hid away in the mountains and creeks, but it takes hard work to get it out, and mining is a Lottery business at best, with many blanks for one prize. I have seen men here that came in 49 and are not worth anything now, while others come and only stay a few months and are lucky enough to make a few thousand and return to their old home, well satisfied.

". . . My first claim is on Long Gulch," Cowden continued, "and cost me two hundred dollars, but as yet have not made anything out of it, but hope I will when we get

water enough to work to good advantage. I do not regret coming to California, although I have not made anything yet. It is a very healthy country, and to me is a very pleasant place to live, and if a few others were here would spend the rest of my life here or some other part of the Pacific Coast."

We have no record of where James Cowden spent the rest of his life.

**E**liza Ann McAuley, the 17-year-old who had tamed a young antelope and learned Indian words on the trail, settled in California. Two years later in Sacramento she married Robert Seely Egbert, a 49er from Indiana. Later they owned a large ranch in Solano County.

Albert Paschal, who had been so impressed with immense herds of buffalo, mined for gold until late 1853, when he returned to Columbus City, Iowa. There he married Mary G. Getts in 1854. They lived in various spots in Iowa; he died in 1900.

Richard Keen, who had scaled trail landmarks to leave his name "above all others," wandered in California for some time. After stints ranching, mining, and milling, and wishing he "had never heard of California," he took a ship from San Francisco, to Panama, to New York—and then home to Iowa.

—The Editor



Iowa tourists pose by a cograil excursion car ascending Pike's Peak in Colorado, 1893. Lured by powerful western landscape photography and railroad promotions, Americans trekked to western landmarks once considered formidable obstacles.